

Exodus 19

God's message through Moses to Pharaoh had been to let Israel go so they might worship God in the wilderness: 5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3. This chapter fulfills that anticipation. The theme of the Bible is: the salvation of man through Jesus Christ to the glory of God. To bring Jesus into the world, God chose the family of Abraham (Gen. 22:18-19). In order to keep the family of Israel faithful to Him (at least monotheistic), God gave Israel the Law of (through) Moses. This chapter begins the revelation of the Law to Moses. In Exodus 15:11, Moses sings that the exodus was to reveal the "awesome glory" of God. We see that glory revealed here.

TRANSLATION - 19:1-6:

1 In the third month to go out the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt, in that day they came to the wilderness of Sinai. **2** And they traveled from Rephidim and they came to the wilderness of Sinai and they camped at the wilderness and Israel camped there opposite the mountain. **3** And Moses went up to God and Jehovah called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you will say to the house of Jacob and you will announce to the sons of Israel: **4** 'You saw what I did to Egypt and I raised you on wings of eagles and I brought you to Me. **5** And now, if to obey, you will obey my voice then you will keep My covenant and you will be to Me special above all the peoples that [are before] Me on all the earth. **6** And you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These [are] the words which you will speak to the sons of Israel."

HEBREW WORDS:

"Wilderness" (ver. 1) could also be translated "desert." It was used earlier at 3:1, 18. "To travel" (ver. 2) was used earlier at 12:37. "To camp" was used earlier at 13:20. "To go up" (ver. 3) was used earlier at 1:10. "To call" was used earlier at 1:18. "House" was used earlier at 1:1. "Jacob" was used earlier at 1:1, 5. "To announce" was used earlier at 4:28. "To raise up" (ver. 4) was used earlier at 6:8. "Wings" is used 111 times in the OT. In Exodus, it is used at 19:4; 25:20; 37:9. It can also mean "extremity." "Eagles" is used only here in Exodus, out of 26 times. "To obey" (ver. 5) can also mean "to submit." It was first used at 2:15, 24. "To keep" or "to preserve" was used earlier at 10:28. "Covenant" was used earlier at 2:24. "Special" is used eight times in the OT: Exo. 19:5; Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Mal. 3:17; Psa. 135:4; Ecc. 2:8; 1 Chron. 29:3. "Kingdom" (ver. 6) was used twice in Genesis: 10:10; 20:9; it is used only here in Exodus. It is used 117 times in the OT. "Priests" were found earlier at 2:16; 3:1. This is the first reference to "priests" relative to the nation of Israel. "Holy" is actually a noun, combined with "nation" to refer to a "holy nation." This word is only found here and 29:31 in Exodus, out of 117 times.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

The pronoun "you" (ver. 4) is emphatic. "To obey, you will obey" (ver. 5) is an emphatic expression in Hebrew, the infinitive absolute followed by the imperfect form of the same verb.

REFERENCES (REFERIRI) AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

Representing God's deliverance as "eagles' wings" (ver. 4) might allude to the picture of the Holy Spirit "moving" (like a mother bird fluttering over its nest) over the face of the waters at the creation (Gen. 1:2).

ARCHAEOLOGY:

"Sinai" (ver. 1) was mentioned earlier at 16:1. The name is used 35 times; after the Law of Moses, it is mentioned in: Judges 5:5; Psalm 68:9, 18; Neh. 9:13. The traditional site of Mount Sinai is Jubal Musa, which is 7,488 feet above sea level. However, if God had wanted man to know where Mount Sinai was, there would be no question or doubt even today.

COMMENTARY:

Three months since Israel left Egypt, they find themselves in the wilderness of Sinai, at the mountain where God wanted to meet with them. God sent Moses to Pharaoh to let Israel go so they could worship God (3:12; 5:1). Now, He enters that relationship with Israel. They had been at Rephidim, in the vicinity of Mount Sinai since 17:1 and have now come to the special meeting with God.

In the first of several ascents (ver. 3), Moses went up the mountain to God and Jehovah God spoke to him from the mountain. Observe in verse 3 that “house of Jacob” is synonymous with “sons of Israel.” “Jacob” refers to the patriarch, using the name given by his mother (Gen. 29:35); “Israel” is the same people, using the name given by Jehovah God (Gen. 32:28).

Moses was to inform Israel of several facts, which form the basis of the covenant God will make with Israel. In other words, based on God’s actions, He has the right to require certain behaviors from Israel. While scholars have noted many similarities between the Law of Moses and Ancient Near Eastern treaties, it is also true that the Law is quite unique from many respects. No other nation had a God who entered into a treaty (“covenant” is the biblical word) with His people. The setting for the Law being given to Israel here at Mount Sinai is also unique among Ancient Near Eastern nations.

First, God reminds Israel of what He did to Egypt (ver. 4). This refers to all His miraculous actions from chapter 7 through the crossing of the Red Sea, and drowning the Egyptian army, in chapter 14.

Second, God brought Israel “on eagles’ wings” and brought them to Him. The “eagles’ wings” is a poetic description of God’s deliverance and provision which we saw from chapters 16-18. In this way, He brought Israel to Himself. See 2:24; 6:4-5 for earlier references to God desiring to bring Israel to Himself.

Based on what God has done for Israel, He commands them in verse 5 to “obey” and the word could be understood as “listen” or “submit.” That is the fundamental response man owes to Jehovah God: obedience. The covenant is based on the response, obedience, of the people; if (when) they stop obeying, they forfeit their rights in the covenant. Most of the rest of the Old Testament is devoted to rehearsing the history of Israel’s disobedience. However, God’s broader goal is to bring Jesus Christ into the world to save mankind from their sins (Matt. 1:21) and God will do that despite Israel’s disobedience.

As long as Israel obeys and keeps God’s covenant, they will be “special” to God above all peoples who are on the earth (ver. 5). All peoples belong to God; Israel is special among them all. As part of their obligations in the covenant, Israel will also be a “kingdom of priests,” (ver. 6) or a “royal priesthood” as well as a “holy nation.” “Priests” represented God to the people and they represented the people to God. As a group of “priests,” the whole nation of Israel was to represent God to the peoples of the world and mediate the peoples’ response to Jehovah God. Using other words, the prophet Isaiah will quote God to Israel (43:10; see also 49:6), saying: “You are My witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me.”

The fact that Israel would be a “kingdom” shows that Jehovah God was their king (Exo. 15:18; see our comments there), but also that they would be a nation overseen by a king (see comments at Genesis 17:6, 16). The fact that Israel would be a “holy” nation reflects the idea that she would also be a “priesthood.” The word “holy” means “separate.” She would not live like other nations, act like other nations, talk like other nations, worship like other nations. She would be different. She would be dedicated to Jehovah God for a special and unique purpose: bringing Jesus into the world (see Rom. 9:5).

God needed to bring Jesus into the world in order to save mankind from their (our) sins (John 3:16). To accomplish this, He needed a people and He chose the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 22:18), Israel. God’s intention was for Israel to stay faithful to Him (remain monotheistic in a polytheistic world) so they could accept Jesus when He came to earth, become His followers (Christians), and then share the Gospel with the rest of the world. The

Law of Moses was designed largely to keep Israel monotheistic. If even Israel gave itself to idolatry and polytheism, then there would be no one who would believe that Jesus was the Christ, the only unique Son of the Living God (John 1:18; 3:16; Matt. 16:16-18).

Moses shared these words with the nation of Israel (ver. 6).

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Compare this paragraph with Moses' words 40 years later at Deuteronomy 32:9-12. For more on God's attitude toward Israel, see: Deut. 7:6-8; 14:2; 26:18. Israel was set apart from other nations for God's purposes: Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:18-19; 32:10. Israel often promised to keep God's covenant regulations: Exo. 24:3, 7; Deut. 5:27. The key principle by which Israel would be a "kingdom of priests" would be for it to reflect the holy nature of Jehovah God: Leviticus 11:45; 19:1; 20:7, 26.

Later Jewish writers - It was important for other Jewish writers to point out the relationship between God and Israel: Psalms 114:1-2; 135:4; Ecclesiastes 2:8; 1 Chronicles 29:3; Mal. 3:17. See also Isaiah 61:6. Isaiah also talks about Israel's favored nation status: 62:12. Isaiah will use the exodus as a picture of Israel's return from Babylonian exile: 35:6-7; 41:17-18; 43:19-21; 48:21. For God's attitude toward Israel in the prophets, see Ezekiel 16:4-6. Hundreds of years after Moses, Amos will speak for God (3:2) and tell Israel that *because* she was a special treasure to God, therefore He would punish her for her sins. For other references to the eagle, see 2 Sam. 1:23; Isaiah 40:31.

NT writers - Peter will apply the words of verses 5-6 to the church of Christ in 1 Peter 2:9. In a way similar to Israel (see above under "Later Jewish writers"), Christians are a "holy nation and a royal priesthood" in order to "proclaim the greatness of the One who called us out of darkness." See also Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6. Since all Christians together form the new "kingdom of priests," there is no need for a "priesthood" in Christianity. Such a theology is a remnant of the Law of Moses which was canceled by the sacrifice of Christ. As Martin Luther rediscovered, the church is a "universal priesthood of all believers." No one needs a priest to access the blessings of God, except our high priest, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:27; 9:11-28; 10:10).

For a NT perspective of Israel's role, see Romans 9:1-5; 15:8-12; Acts 13:47; 15:14-18; Gal. 3:8-9. Jesus will say in John 4:22 that "salvation is of the Jews;" that is, Jesus came through the Jewish people. In Christ, Christians are now God's "peculiar / special people" (Titus 2:14). While God does love the whole world (John 3:16), He has a special place in His heart, a special love, reserved for those who are "in" Christ Jesus, Christians: Romans 8:39. Christians are certainly called to be holy as well: 1 Peter 1:15; 1 Thess. 4:3-4, 7-8.

TRANSLATION - 19:7-13:

7 Moses came and called to the elders of the people and he put before them all these words which Jehovah had commanded. **8** And all the people answered in oneness and said, "All which Jehovah speaks, we will do." And Moses returned the words of the people to Jehovah. **9** And Jehovah said to Moses, "Behold, I Myself am coming to you in a pillar of cloud so that the people will hear My words with you and even in you they will trust indefinitely." And Moses announced the words of the people to Jehovah.

10 And Jehovah said to Moses, "Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow and they will wash their garments. **11** And they should be ready on the third day because on the third day Jehovah will come down before the eyes of all the people at Mount Sinai. **12** And I will set bounds for the people around [them] saying, "Protect yourselves to go up on the mountain and to touch the borders; everyone touching the mountain to die he will die. **13** Do not touch it by hand because to stone, he will be stoned or to shoot, he will be shot if an animal, if a man, he will not live. When he stretches out the rams' horns these will go up on the mountain."

HEBREW WORDS:

“Elders” (ver. 7) was seen earlier at 3:16, 18. “People” was seen earlier at 1:9, 20, 22. “To command” was seen earlier at 1:22. “To answer” (ver. 8) was used earlier at 4:1; 15:21. “Behold” (ver. 9) was used earlier at 1:9. “Pillar” is used only here in Exodus, out of 31 times. It actually means “cloud.” The word for “cloud” is used earlier at 13:21-22. This expression refers to clouds on top of clouds or a “pillar of cloud.” “To trust” was used earlier at 4:1, 5, 8-9, 31. “Indefinitely,” often translated “forever,” was used earlier in Exodus at 3:15; 12:14, 17, 24.

The verb “to sanctify” (ver. 10) is related to the word “holy” used in verse 6. This word was used earlier at 13:2. “To wash” is used only here in Exodus: 19:10, 14. It is found 51 times in the OT. “Garments” refers to the outer clothing; it was used earlier at 3:22. “To come down” (ver. 11) was used earlier at 2:5; 3:8. “To set bounds” (ver. 12) is only used in this context (Exo. 19:12, 23); Deut. 19:14; Josh. 18:20; Zech. 9:2. “To touch” was used earlier at 4:25. “Border” is used 92 times, in Exodus earlier at 13:20; 16:35. “To stone” (ver. 13) was used earlier at 8:22. “To shoot” is used 28 times, only here in Exodus. “Animal” was used earlier at 8:13-14. “To stretch out” or “to prolong” was used earlier at 12:21. “Ram’s horn” is found 9 times in the OT, only here in Exodus.

HEBREW GRAMMAR:

“To die, he will die” (ver. 12; the same expression was used in Genesis 2:17) and “to stone he will be stoned” (ver. 13) and “to shoot he will be shot” translate an emphatic expression in Hebrew, the infinitive absolute followed by the same verb in an imperfect form. The phrase “no hand” (ver. 13) is also emphatic.

REFERENCES (REFERIRI) AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

God called on Jacob and his family to remove the idols from their homes, change their garments, and sanctify themselves (Gen. 35:2).

COMMENTARY:

As Moses always did, he obeys Jehovah God yet again (ver. 7). He assembles the leaders, the elders who were appointed in the previous chapter, and he conveyed to them the message of God. The people respond in unity and commit themselves in full-hearted devotion to obey Jehovah God (ver. 8). Then Moses went back up the mountain to relay that message to God. Jehovah responded to Moses (ver. 9) that He would come to Moses (the “you” in verse 9 is singular) in a pillar of cloud and the people will hear His words - through Moses - and they will trust Moses indefinitely (“forever,” which is quite a long time!). Recall in 4:31 that Israel trusted Moses. At the end of verse 9, it appears that Moses returned a second time to the people and rehearsed God’s newest message.

Perhaps verse 10 records yet a third conversation between Jehovah God and Moses, in which God tells Moses to go to the people and sanctify them that day and the second day they should wash their clothes. We do not know all the details of this “sanctification” ritual. While the clothes did not have any physical purpose in approaching God, it helped teach and train Israel that entrance into Jehovah God’s presence in worship is an extremely important and special event. Man needs to separate that action from all his other, daily, actions. On the third day (ver. 11), Israel should be ready so Jehovah God can “come down” before the eyes of all the people at Mount Sinai. This would be an experience which should impress on their minds the holiness and the power of Jehovah God.

Because God’s holiness consumes sin, God stated (ver. 12) that He would set boundaries around the mountain, to create a separation between Him and the people. They should not and could not go up the mountain nor touch the boundaries God creates. If they were to do so, they would certainly die. That is how serious it is to approach God, even in worship today! Worship should be entered with the highest degree of reverence and awe and respect for the ways in which God has commanded worship be fulfilled.

In verse 13, Jehovah God informs Israel that they could not even touch the boundary nor the individual who might break through the boundary. Rather, he was to be stoned to death

(from a distance) or shot through with an arrow (from a distance), whether animal or man. Touching someone destined to die by God's wrath would bring uncleanness. The sounding of the rams' horns would be the signal for ascending the mountain.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, do not respect the boundaries God has put around worship to Him and God sends fire from heaven and consumes their bodies (Lev. 19:1-2). The Bible is emphatic no one has ever seen God, nor can man see God in his physical form: Exodus 33:20; Isaiah 6:4; 45:15; John 1:18; 1 John 4:12.

Later Jewish writers - King David does not consult the Law of Moses with respect to God's worship and it costs Uzzah his life (2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 13 & 15).

NT writers - When John receives his vision recorded in the book of Revelation, he first sees God separated from humanity by a sea of glass like crystal (4:6). Yet, once the history of humankind is consummated and earth is destroyed (21:1), John sees that sea of glass removed, denoting the removal of all barriers separating man from God. That access to God can only be reality through Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:13-18; Heb. 10:10). The need to approach God in acts of worship which are authorized in the New Testament is just as important and relevant for Christians today. God is still a consuming fire (Heb. 12:28-29). The only way mankind can approach God is through a relationship with Jesus Christ which is completed when one is immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins (see Heb. 10:22; Eph. 1:7; Acts 2:38; 22:16).

It was and is necessary for God to reveal Himself in Jesus Christ for man to know God (Matt. 11:27; Col. 2:9).

TRANSLATION - 19:14-25:

14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and he sanctified the people and they washed their garments. **15** And he said to the people, "You will be ready for the third day. Do not approach to a woman. **16** And it will be on the third day when it will be morning that there will be thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain and the sound of the ram's horn very strong and all the people will tremble in the camp."

17 And Moses brought up the people to meet God from the camp and they stood at the lower part of the mountain. **18** And the mountain of Sinai smoked all from before them when Jehovah came down to them in fire and smoke went up like smoke of the furnace and all the mountain trembled exceedingly. **19** And it was the sound of the ram's horn went out and was very strong and Moses spoke to God and He answered in a sound. **20** And Jehovah went down on the mountain of Sinai to the pinnacle of the mountain and Jehovah called to Moses to the pinnacle of the mountain and Moses went up.

21 And Jehovah said to Moses, "Go down and testify among the people lest they break through to Jehovah to see and many fall from among them. **22** And even the priests approaching to Jehovah, let them sanctify themselves lest Jehovah break out among them."

23 And Moses said to Jehovah, "The people were not able to go up to the mountain of Sinai because You testified among us saying, 'I have set boundaries around the mountain' and You sanctified it."

24 And Jehovah said to him, "Go. Go down and you yourself will go up and Aaron with you and the priests and the people, let them not break through to go up to Jehovah lest He break through among you."

25 So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them...

HEBREW WORDS:

"To approach" (ver. 15) is used 125 times in the OT, 13 times in Exodus. "Voice" (ver. 16) is also the word for "thunder" in this context and "sound" of the ram's horn. It was used earlier at 3:18. "Lightning" is used only here in Exodus, out of 21 times. "Ram's horn" is used at 19:16, 19; 20:18 in Exodus, out of 72 times. "Strong" was used earlier at 3:19. "To tremble" is used

only in this context in Exodus (19:16, 18). It is used 39 times in the OT. "To stand" (ver. 17) was used earlier at 8:16; 9:13; 14:13. "Lower part" is used only here in Exodus; it was used at Genesis 6:16, out of 19 times in the OT. "To smoke" (ver. 18) is used only 6 times in the OT, only here in Exodus. "Fire" was used earlier at 3:2. The noun "smoke" is related to the verb also used in this verse. It is used 25 times in the OT, only here and 20:18 in Exodus. "Furnace" was used in Genesis 19:28 and Exodus 9:8, 10. This is its last use in the OT. "To answer" (ver. 19) was used at 4:1; 15:21.

"To go down" (ver. 21) was used in this chapter at: 19:11, 14, 18, 20-21, 24-25. It was used earlier at 2:5. "To testify" is used here (19:21, 23) and 21:29 in Exodus, out of 40 times. It also means "to warn." "To break through or to demolish" was used earlier at 15:7. "To fall" was used earlier at 15:16. "To approach" was used earlier at 19:15. "To break out" was used earlier at 1:12.

REFERENCES (REFERIRI) AND ALLUSIONS TO GENESIS:

A picture similar to the appearance of God (ver. 18) is found in Genesis 15:17 when God made a covenant with Abraham. There is also a similarity to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:28.

COMMENTARY:

Moses went down the mountain yet again to the people and fulfilled what God had commanded (ver. 14) so that the people could be "sanctified," the verbal counterpart to the adjective "holy." They washed their garments as God had commanded and Moses also commanded them to refrain from sexual relationships (ver. 15). This was likely for two purposes: first, to help Israel focus on the importance of their spiritual actions for the next day; secondly, to separate the sexual act from worship so that Israel would understand that sexual relationships have no purpose within the context of worship services. Pagan religions often and still incorporate sexual acts and religious prostitution into their worship services. On the third day, the day specified by Jehovah God (ver. 16), God will make His presence known (remember, God dwells in "unapproachable light" - 1 Tim. 6:16, and cannot be seen) through thunder, lightning, and a heavy cloud and the ram's horn would sound loudly and the people will fear the presence of Jehovah God.

In verse 17, Moses brought up the sanctified people to meet God as far as God would allow, "at the lower part of the mountain." Verse 18 records the reaction of the mountain at the presence of God: smoke and fire, "like the smoke of a furnace." The mountain itself trembled greatly. In verse 19, Moses records that the ram's horn sounded loudly and Moses spoke to God and He answered in a "sound." We do not know what that "sound" was if it was not the thunders from the lightning. So Jehovah God came down to meet the people whom He had called out of Egypt (ver. 20). At that point, He called Moses to meet Him at the top ("pinnacle") of the mountain. This was no doubt partly to impress on the minds of the Israelites the important role that Moses would serve in revealing the message of God.

So Jehovah told Moses (ver. 21) to return to the people and "testify" to them so they would not "break through" the boundary God had set so that they would not fall dead. The "priests" in verse 22 are not known. The priesthood will not be established until later; these were men serving in the role of priests until the sons of Levi can be appointed to serve (Exodus 28). Maybe they were firstborn males; maybe they were elders. The priests also had to be careful approaching Jehovah God so that He would not "break out" among them in His holiness.

Moses comments to Jehovah that the people could not come up further on the mountain since God had testified that He had set boundaries and had sanctified the mountain to the extent of His holy presence (ver. 23). Therefore, Jehovah told Moses to return to Israel and along with Aaron, be careful that the priests and the people respect His boundaries so that no one will fall dead.

The chapter ends recording that Moses returns to Israel to share the laws of God, which begin to be revealed in the next chapter...

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - The sexual relationship was considered to make an Israelite unclean ceremonially: Lev. 15:16-18; Deut. 23:10-11. Moses ascends and descends Mount Sinai six times: 19:3, 7; 19:8, 14; 19:20, 25; 20:21 & 24:3; 24:9 & 32:15; 34:4, 29. Israel will tremble with fear again after the giving of the Ten Commandments: 20:18-19. In fact, Moses was afraid, according to the writer of Hebrews (12:21). The power of the revelation of God on Mount Sinai was to confirm to the Israelites that God had spoken and was speaking to Moses. See Deuteronomy 4:11-12; 5:4-5, 22, 24.

Later Jewish writers - We see a reference to the uncleanness of the sexual relationship in 1 Samuel 21:4-5. For other appearances of God, see: 1 Sam. 7:10; 12:18; Job 38:1; 40:6; Psa. 18:13-14. For a similar appearance of God to Elijah, see 1 Kings 19:11-12. The trumpet blasts will be used as a metaphor to denote the coming of the great "Day of the Lord" (Joel 2:1; Zeph. 1:16; Isa. 27:13; Zech. 9:14).

NT writers - Using the "trumpet" as probably a symbol, Paul writes that the second coming of Christ will be accompanied by the blast of a trumpet: 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16. The writer of Hebrews will reflect on the Sinai event as he emphasizes the importance of respecting Jesus Christ and His law: Heb. 12:18-24. Trumpets are also used extensively in the book of Revelation to herald the coming wrath of God on Rome: Revelation 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14. Paul will inform Christians that they might abstain from sexual relations, if their spouse agrees, so they can give time to prayer (1 Cor. 7:5).

Christians have an obligation to maintain spiritual purity when they come into God's presence (2 Cor. 7:1). See also Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 3:1-2; only the NT can define what is "pure" and what is "impure." Man has no ability to define these terms. The purpose of miracles in the NT was to confirm to the original audience - and through the written record in the NT, to us today - that God has spoken through Jesus Christ and His apostles (Heb. 2:3-4).